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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

“The Red-Legged Devils” Brooklyn’s Best Regiment

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: “The Red-Legged Devils”, Brooklyn’s Best Regiment

Author: Major T.J. Hartshorne, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: What factors contributed to making the Fourteenth Brooklyn a superior regiment and what forces existed to maintain this high level of combat efficiency over time.

Discussion: The Fourteenth Regiment New York State Militia of Brooklyn, New York gathered an impressive combat record during the Civil War, yet the Professional Military Education world rarely takes notice of their deeds. They were first formed on 5 July 1847 when the New York State Legislature consolidated the individual militia companies into regiments. During the Civil War the Fourteenth Regiment fought in 29 engagements and sustained over 700 casualties. Their battles include participation in both Bull Runs, Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, Wilderness and Spotsylvania. Though noted primarily for actions in the Civil War, the Regiment also served in the Spanish American War, World Wars I and II, and Korea, though under different unit designations. The Fourteenth Regiment’s past can be a road to our future. An insight to their performance under fire can provide today’s students a timeless template on how to conduct combat operations.

Conclusion(s) or Recommendations: Five factors, when taken collectively, made the Fourteenth Regiment a superior combat unit. The Brooklyn communities exerted extraordinary force on the men to fight. As a militia unit, the soldiers had a close relationship to the rest of the community. The support from the citizen created a heightened sense of *Espirit d’ Corps* in the regiment. The existing soldiers and the newer recruits were of the highest caliber, facilitating an easy transition from “citizen” to “soldier”. As individuals and as a unit the soldiers strove for technical and tactical proficiency. The men fought for the honor of the regiment. The regiment took on a spirit like quality that in return for the men submission to it, returned to the men courage in trying times.

PREFACE

All writers have to overcome obstacles, whether real or self-inflicted. For me, two nagging issues had to be resolved. I had to first justify in my mind writing yet another work based on a legendary Civil War unit. Caught in this indecisiveness, Karl von Clausewitz provided me the confidence to press on. He advocated the study of the history of war, because as he said, “in the art of war experience counts far more than any number of abstract truths”.³ In other words, legitimate “theory” must be grounded in reality and backed up by real world experiences. Clausewitz often used the European based battles of Frederick the Great and Napoleon as examples to give credibility to his arguments. This led me to believe that I could use the Fourteenth Regiment from Brooklyn, New York to reinforce my proposition that certain factors are critical in making some combat units superior, regardless of time, country or technology. Author Michael Howard gave me addition inspiration when he wrote that Clausewitz “quite deliberately limited his analysis to what was likely to be of immediate utility to a commander planning a campaign”.⁴ This fell right in line with my goal of identifying for today’s commanders the intangibles that are inherent in great units so they can seek these qualities for their own organizations.

The second issue to overcome was the constant temptation to give into my pre-existing passion for the Fourteenth Brooklyn and simply add to the glory of these men from my hometown. It is easy to fall victim to the historical accounts, some might say not always distinct. Primary sources make no mention of flaws with the Fourteenth’s tactics or character of the soldiers. I have been left with the impression that authors want their books to be

³ Carl Von Clausewitz, (Michael Howard and Peter Paret eds.), *On War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 164.

⁴ Michael Howard, *Clausewitz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 2.

received warmly so they write with a subjective hand. Speechmakers have an unspoken obligation to stir the souls of the audience so they gloss over the unflattering points. Commanders writing a post battle report have their unit's, and their own, reputations to protect so they write accordingly. Only the personal letters of the soldiers offer an unfiltered, honest critique of the Fourteenth. In a determined effort to balance this work, I relied heavily on these letters to identify weaknesses with the regiment. In order to overcome my fear of not staying objective, I inserted the majority of the negative comment available, even at the risk of angering staunch supporters of the Fourteenth such as the re-enactment community. Ironically, the quest to find fault with the Fourteenth had the opposite affect. The percentage of negative comments was tiny. Many of the comments I would consider trivial. In the end, one of the true indicators that the Fourteenth was an exception regiment stems from the lack of discontent within the ranks.

I would like to extend a special thanks to D. Richard L. DiNardo, Ph.D., my mentor. Dr. DiNardo pointed me to the book *Wilson's Creek* by authors William G. Piston and Richard Hatcher III. This book helped crystallize my thoughts and hopefully transition my jumbled words into coherent sentences.

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CHAPTER 1

For the majority of Americans today the name “Brooklyn” conjures up images of gangsters, congestion and hard accents. But those who have lived on her streets understand the character and strength of this city. Below the scars of urban decay still lies a city blessed with culture, history, and a remarkably diverse population. After the recent attacks on the World Trade Center, New York demonstrated its typical resolve. It comes as no surprise that this region endured because there exists within New York a legacy of bravery in the face of adversity. A century and a half ago, this nation was faced with its biggest challenge as the Republic suffered through its only civil war. Within the chaos of this sorrowful chapter of American history, a small cadre of Brooklyn men known as the Fourteenth Regiment, bound by a common goal, accomplished great feats of courage and sacrifice. “The Fourteenth Brooklyn was one of the militia regiments which gave up their legal three month militia obligation and volunteered en masse in April 1861 for three year war service.”³ When the Fourteenth Regiment initially marched off to Washington D.C. they were known by the people as the “Brooklyn Chasseurs”. After some early encounters with the Confederates, the southern gentlemen gave them a new name, “...for on occasions the Fourteenth made matters decidedly unpleasant for those who fought under the Stars and Bars. The title ‘Red-Legged Devils’ was derived partly from the fact that the men wore red trousers, but also because they had a habit of making their presence felt wherever they went”.⁴ Before they were mustered out in 1864, the Red-Legged Devils had taken part in 29 engagements, sustained 717 casualties, and helped restore a broken nation.

³Colonel Charles G. Stevenson, State Judge Advocate, *Brooklyn’s Red Legged Devils at Gettysburg*, Department of Archives, New York Army National Guard, Stonybrook, NY.

⁴ C.V. Tevis and D.R. Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth: Published in commemoration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Muster of the Regiment into the United States Service, May 23, 1861* (Baltimore, MD: Butternut and Blue, 1911), 7.

The Fourteenth Regiment has a lengthy and impressive combat record gained by blood and courage. The Red-Legged Devils are best remembered for their attack at the railroad cut in Gettysburg, but their contributions to our nation go well beyond Seminary Ridge. From Bull Run to Spotsylvania, battle after battle, they fought with tenacity and bravery. Their Civil War impact is disproportionate to the few number of soldiers who served in the regiment. Though their ranks never exceeded 1,000 men, the regiment was critical to the Union's eventual success. Today the Fourteenth Regiment is somewhat obscure in the minds of students and historians. When mustered into federal service the Fourteenth's unit designation became the 84th New York. The soldiers were displeased and fought vigorously to reclaim the "Fourteenth". Though their efforts were successful during the war, historical accounts still recorded their heroics under the 84th designation. With the exception of a hand full of bright individuals, few can separate the Red-Legged Devils out from the 84th. In the end, it could be argued that the men's loyalty to the "Fourteenth" denied them the historical spotlight they so richly deserve.

Though this work will focus on the regiment during the Civil War, it must be noted that the Fourteenth continued to serve our nation for many years. The regiment was reorganized on 6 July 1864 and placed in the New York National Guard as the 14th Infantry. The regiment was often called out and mustered into federal service. In 1898 they served at Chickamauga, Georgia and Anniston, Alabama. The Fourteenth served in the Spanish American War. During World War I the regiment served on the Hindenberg Line. In 1940 the regiment was "redesignated the 187th Field Artillery, the 187th Signal Brigade, and the 955th Field Artillery. All these units fought with distinction in Europe during World War II. They were present during D-Day and saw action on Omaha Beach. During the Korean Conflict, the 955th Field Artillery was called

into active service and fought at Inchon”.⁵ In 1970 they were put on alert for Vietnam. Today the Fourteenth is survived by the 187th Signal Brigade, New York Army National Guard. The battle hardened Red-Legged veterans who established this great legacy have long passed yet their spirit lives on to encourage present and future generations. In a sense, they continue to serve our nation.

The Fourteenth Regiment’s past can be a road to our future. The United States Armed Forces today unquestionably sit atop of the world’s armies. Our greatness comes from our study and reflection of the past, determination in the present, and the continual emphasis toward the future. The superiority of the Marine Corps today can be directly linked to our past infatuation with the German military machine of the last century, combined with a healthy dose of the “*Espirit d’ Corps*”, as best exemplified by the soldiers of Napoleon. Now as we move into uncertain times it once again becomes imperative to look to the past for guidance for the future. This is why a study of the Fourteenth Regiment is appropriate. An insight to the Fourteenth Regiment’s performance under fire provides today’s military students a timeless template on how to conduct combat operations. The intent of this study is to uncover the intangibles that made the “Red-Legged Devils” a superior combat organization. As these intangibles gain clarity, they can serve as a “framework for success” that today’s war fighters can look to for guidance. There needs to be some retelling of history to give the reader a sense of the regiment’s involvement during the Civil War. However, keep in mind the point of this work is to use the legacy of these men to serve as lessons for those in uniform today.

Five factors, when taken collectively, made the Fourteenth a superior combat unit. First, men have waged war for a variety of reasons, some noble, some not. In 1861, the men had a noble

⁵ “Fourteenth Regiment, NYSM, Co. E,” URL: <<http://www.users.erols.com/am14nysm/today.hmt>>., accessed 20 January 2002.

reason. The catalyst for Brooklyn men to fight was the influence of the local communities. The Brooklyn communities, with their dynamic history and unique inhabitants, had particularly acute social forces at work. When the call to arms came, the Brooklyn community “exerted extraordinary force” on the men to fight”.⁶ Being a conscientious objector was not an option. Young men wanted to fight, not because they were from Brooklyn, but because they were part of a community that expected them to fight.

Second, as a militia unit, the soldiers close relationship to the community gave all of the Brooklyn people a bond with the soldiers at the front. “Going to war was preeminently a collective experience, for it involved the entire community, not just the men who became soldiers.”⁷ The people helped to prepare and sustain the regiment. They suffered during the hard times and basked in the good times. In effect, all the Brooklyn people belonged to the “Fighting Fourteenth”. The soldiers understood this and gained strength by knowing that on the battlefield they had the “spirit of the city” as an unseen ally. This hometown support gave rise to the regiment’s heightened sense of esprit d’ corps. Third, the men in the ranks were of the highest caliber. They were selfless, patriotic, intelligent and strong. They possessed the basic tools to turn the “citizen” into the “soldier”. To use an expression of today, they had the “right stuff”. Fourth, they strove for tactical precision through rigorous training. The soldiers had a common, single-minded emphasis on, and zeal for drilling, critical for battlefield execution. Fifth, the spirit of the “regiment” took on a mystical aura. Men fought for the honor of the “regiment”. In turn, the “regiment” gave them courage in trying times.

The synergistic effect of these five factors gave rise to one of the finest American regiments in our history. Many units can acquire two, maybe three of these traits, but rarely can one achieve all five. The goal of all warriors today should be to emulate the “Red-Legged Devils”.

⁶ William Garrett Piston and Richard W. Hatcher III, *Wilson’s Creek* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 3.

CHAPTER 2

Brooklyn is a small geographical area, yet it has generated a spectacular history in a short period of time. It is a history as noteworthy as Boston or Williamsburg in the growth of our nation. In 1631, the Dutch claimed a large portion of what is today's Brooklyn as part of the New Netherlands. Brooklyn then "became part of the New York Colony under the British colonial system in 1664". Brooklyn was strategically significant during the American Revolution due to its harbors and ports, key to trade and transportation along the eastern seaboard. After the British defeat, Brooklyn expanded as it acquired Williamsburg and Greenpoint plus "the remaining townships of Bushwick, New Utrecht, New Lots, Flatbush, Flatlands and Gravesend."⁸ Just prior to the start of the Civil War, Brooklyn's population had expanded to 279,122 residents. During the Civil War, Brooklyn supplied men, equipment, and financial resources to the Union. Most drivers today do not realize that the Brooklyn tower of the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge "rests on a reef formerly occupied by Fort Lafayette, used as a military prison during the Civil War".⁹ After the Civil War, Brooklyn became a manufacturing giant and a renowned cultural center, which can be experienced today by a trip to the Brooklyn Museum.

The mid 1840's found New York with only one division, the First Division, with uniformed soldiers. With the onset of the Mexican War, state officials were concerned about their ability to train and maintain adequate forces. They looked to Brooklyn's Kings and Richmond counties, which had organized military units comprising the Second Division. By definition, the militia was required to supplement the regular army in an emergency. As their

⁷ Piston and Hatcher, *Wilson's Creek*, 5.

⁸ Brian Merlis and Oscar Israelowitz, *Welcome Back to Brooklyn* (Brooklyn, NY: Israelowitz Publishing, 1993), 7.

⁹ Albert A. Nofi, *The Civil War Notebook* (Conshohocken, PA: Combined Books, Inc., 1993), 144.

forefathers had done seven decades earlier, the militia was organized and trained to confront internal crisis. They had colorful names such as the Continental Guard, the Jefferson Greys, and the Union Blues. The militia mission kept them in close proximity to their homes.

With America's expansion and the changing nature of war, how well the militia could supplement the regular army on a distant battlefield is debatable. On May 13, 1847 the legislature of New York passed a bill calling for the reorganization of the state militia by consolidating and reducing the number of brigades and regiments. "It was the general intention to encourage the formation of unified companies and place citizen soldiery on a more distinctively military basis."¹⁰ In the spirit of this reorganization, the 265th Regiment, 44th Brigade of the Second Division became the Fourteenth Regiment New York State Militia on July 5, 1847. "At this time, the Fourteenth was a social club composed of men of venerable lineage. The regiment gathered on weekends and evenings for recreation and to demonstrate their readiness to serve in time of need."¹¹

Colonel Philip S. Crook was the second officer appointed by the Governor of New York to organize the Fourteenth Regiment. He had the mission to establish the regimental district, recruit new men and serve as the commanding officer. In an enthusiastic initial muster, Company A was formed from the nucleus of the existing Union Blues militia. Company B was formed from a hybrid of units, mainly the Washington Guards, a volunteer organization attached to the No. 1 Fire Engine Company. First Lieutenant Fowler was one of the officers. He would later become the Fourteenth's esteemed commander. Seven months later, Companies C, D, E, F, and G were mustered. All the units came from the old towns which roughly covered the area that today is downtown Brooklyn. Later, from the nearby villages of Flatbush, New Utrecht and Williamsburg, the complement of men was recruited to form Company H.

¹⁰ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth*, 7.

In 1849, the Fourteenth and Thirteenth Regiments were assigned quarters in the old City Hall and Apprentices Library on the corner of Henry and Cranberry streets. In 1858 they moved into the new armory on Eighth Avenue, 14th and 15th Streets. The same year, Companies B and E withdrew from the regiment but were replaced when Company A was split to fill the void.

“One of the earliest newspaper references to the regiment appeared in the first issue of the ‘New York Times’ on September 18, 1851.”¹² The article spoke to an annual parade and General H.B. Duryea’s review of the Fifth Brigade comprised of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Regiments. The regiment had the chance to participate in some real world missions. In the summer of 1854 they took part in the suppression of riots “created by the preaching of a fanatic who called himself ‘the Angel of Gabriel’”.¹³ The Fourteenth also helped to control the frenzied crowds during the Williamsburg riots. The majority of their time was spent in ceremonies of one kind or another. Their crisp uniforms and lock-step drill were a crowd pleaser. On April 27, 1859 the regiment paraded at a celebration of the introduction of water into the city. In October 1860 the regiment took part in the great reception given to the visiting Prince of Wales. The distinctive uniform worn for the occasion was a dark blue single-breasted frock coat, with three rows of buttons, gold lace trimmings, dark blue trousers, a buff stripe and shako.

The militia soldiers’ main priority was their families and jobs. They would gather for company and regimental drills on the weekends to practice their drill movements. This is very similar to how our reservists do it today. The Fourteenth men were generally proud about the organization but in the early days of the regiment there was some discontent, subordination and woeful lack of interest, which had a negative impact on the entire unit. A patient process of elimination weeded out the trouble-breeding elements. In time, the spirit of the organization

¹¹ “History of the 14th Brooklyn,” URL: <<http://www.14thbrooklyn.net/RealHist.hmt>>., accessed 8 August 2001. Cited hereafter as “History of the 14th Brooklyn.”

¹² “History of the 14th Brooklyn.”

¹³ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth*, 9.

flourished. It is a reasonable assumption to say these men were grounded in the basics of soldiering. They liked the attention their distinctive uniforms generated. They enjoyed the honor and respect given by the community. But how hard is it to look good in uniform? They had no idea of the horrors of war. They were patriotic but untested.

The Fourteenth's world started to change as the storm clouds of the pending Civil War darkened. The first hint of things to come started in April 1861. "The regiment was on several occasions called out and quartered in the Armory in anticipation of an attack upon the Navy Yard by rebel sympathizers. This was afterwards derisively called the 'Navy Yard Scare'." ¹⁴

The Union Army in April 1861 had less than 16,000 men. Of the trained, experienced officers, one-third had already gone to the Confederacy. The day after Fort Sumter's surrender President Lincoln called for 75,000 militia to serve the federal government for three months. "This was based on the Militia Act of 1792, under which each state was assigned a quota of men that must be furnished for the nation's defense." ¹⁵ Few thought the war would last long. It made sense to only require the militia to serve for three months. The Fourteenth was a skeleton of a real regiment. It needed to be fleshed out. With a patriotic fever, the Brooklyn men rushed to enlist. Many were familiar with the Fourteenth through friends and family already associated with the regiment. Many others had witnessed the regiment's precision and bearing during previous parades. Others were drawn to the bright, neat appearance of the regiment's distinct uniforms. As reported in the local newspapers, recruiting was undertaken with "hundreds of people surrounding the recruiting office of the Fourteenth regiment, and hundreds of young men signified their intention to volunteer". ¹⁶ With so many eager men the ranks filled quickly. Young men wanted to be associated with the unit they perceived to be the "best". This recruiting effort mirrors the tactics we use in the Marine Corps. Word of mouth, the continual emphasis on

¹⁴ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth*, 10.

¹⁵ Edward J. Hagerty, *Collin's Zouaves* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1977), 18.

“snap and pop”, and our impeccable appearance are often the key ingredients for closing on the contract.

On April 18, 1861 the Fourteenth Regiment reported their readiness to march to the front. Three of the four Brooklyn militia regiments received their orders. The Thirteenth Regiment was the first to go followed by the Twenty-eighth Regiment. These two regiments served out their three-month terms in the Washington area and returned without seeing action. The Seventieth Regiment remained as a Home Guard regiment. “The Fourteenth Regiment...was the most famous Brooklyn unit. Although...the last to leave, it was the only militia unit to see active service.”¹⁷

There was a time when the regiment almost did not go off to war. While waiting for authorization from New York Governor E.D. Morgan, the regiment remained at Fort Greene, drilling daily and preparing. The officers and men of the Fourteenth became impatient. The Commanding Officer Colonel Alfred M. Wood telegraphed Washington advertising the regiment’s readiness. He was informed that no more men would be received for a shorter term than for three years. The Colonel addressed the regiment. “‘With scarcely a dissenting voice the regiment accepted the terms of enlistment to the United States service proposed to them’. The governor however still did not call on the Fourteenth. ‘Politics was supposed to be behind this delay at the time, and is believed to have been to the present day’.” Fortunately, Congressman Moses O’Dell from Brooklyn took the initiative. Taking advantage of his personal relationship with President Lincoln he solicited and received the orders to get the regiment to Washington. “When the word sped...that the Fourteenth had been ordered to move to the front, Governor Morgan, evidently nettled that the thing had been done over his head, sent a querulous dispatch

¹⁶ “The Feeling in the City”, editorial, *Brooklyn Eagle*, 17 May 1861.

¹⁷ David M. Cory, “Brooklyn and the Civil War,” *The Journal of Long Island History*, Vol IV, No.3, (1964): 27.

to Colonel Wood demanding, 'by what authority' he had ordered his command to move.

Colonel Wood wired back to him, 'By the authority of the President of the United States'." ¹⁸

There was an aggregate of 825 officers and enlisted in line when the regiment departed Brooklyn. Two more companies were added in Washington bringing the total strength to 960. The Fourteenth was assigned to Brigadier General Andrew Porter's brigade.

On May 23, 1861 Major General Irwin McDowell officially mustered the regiment into the United States service for the period of the war unless sooner discharged. The Fourteenth was then known as the Eighty-fourth U.S. Volunteers. The men respected the General but this new unit designation did not sit well with them. They avoided any use of the "84th" and began an underground movement to reclaim the "Fourteenth".

On July 16, 1861 the "nature and spirit of youth colored the bivouac...the last night before the curtain was raised and the horror of war became a reality". The next day the regiment began the first of many demanding marches. On the 21st they crossed Bull Run at Sudley's Ford, moved up the railroad grade and "for the first time heard the shriek of the enemy's shell...". ¹⁹ They crossed the Warrenton pike and took cover near the old, stone "Henry" house, which became known as the "slaughter pen".

Ordered to draw fire away from a Union artillery battery, the regiment moved forward. Artillery tore through their ranks. "No greater test of bravery in battle than this seemingly reckless exposure to the full blast of the opposing guns ever occurred, but not a member of the Fourteenth hesitated. There were no laggards in the ranks which moved forward at command.' Part way up 'they met the Fire Zouaves running hump-backed in disorderly retreat'." ²⁰ The Zouaves' similar uniform accounts for the post battle debates on which units stood and which fled. Lieutenant Samuel J.C. Moore of the 2d Virginia Infantry of Jackson's Brigade

¹⁸ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth*, 16.

¹⁹ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth*, 21-22.

remembered, “The two guns thus advanced towards our left flank were supported by the Brooklyn Regiment, known as ‘Lincoln’s pet lambs’, perhaps the best fighting men McDowell had in the field, the representatives of the lowest class of a City population. Col Cummin’s Regiment had orders to charge upon their Battery, which they did and succeeded in taking the pieces, but were in their turn charged by the Brooklyn Zouaves, who were too strong for them and drove them back in confusion”.²¹ After being flanked, the Fourteenth fell back in good order, but rallied and again tried to seize the hill.

The Fourteenth was able to hold its head high though they lost 23 men. The color bearer Frank Head was one of the mortally wounded. As his comrades tried to take him from the field he said, “Never mind me, boys; take the flag and go on”.²² Colonel Wood was wounded and taken prisoner. After his parole his injuries prevented his return to duty. The regiment’s performance was superb during the fight but, after the battle, they too felt the shock and depression sweeping the army. Soon another “spirit became evident and grew in strength, one of indomitable resolve to retrieve, to achieve victory, without counting the cost”.²³

On November 18, 1861 while the regiment was on picket duty near Falls Church, it had a sharp fight with Jeb Stuart’s First Virginia cavalry. This was the first of many picket engagements they participated in. Confederate Fitzhugh Lee later reported, “The enemy were a portion of the Fourteenth New York State Militia of Brooklyn, and fought with much more bravery than the

²⁰ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth* , 25.

²¹ Editors of Time-Life Books, *Voices of the Civil War-First Manassas* (Alexandria, Va: Time Life Inc., 1997), 133.

²² “Colonel Alfred M. Wood; not Killed but Wounded”, telegraphic dispatch from Moses F. Odell, printed in the *Brooklyn Eagle* , 23 July 1861.

²³ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth* , 52.

Federal troops usually exhibit. It is the same regiment that so quickly dotted the field of Manassas upon the 21st with red.”²⁴

On July 23, 1862 Companies A and B accompanied the Harris Light Cavalry on an expedition towards Richmond. Hard marching and bold action allowed this task force to capture numerous confederates and to destroy confederate railroads and ammunition dumps. The Fourteenth’s brigade commander was told, “Your men must be made of iron to make such marches. From that was adopted the title of Iron Brigade”.²⁵ Ironically, they had already helped the First Brigade, First Division, win the same title during the march from Catlett’s Station to Falmouth on April 15, 1862. Twice earning the chance to claim themselves as the “Iron Brigade”, the men maintained their loyalty to titles associated with Brooklyn, or their red pants.

On August 29, 1862 Longstreet arrived at Groveton near the old Bull Run battlefield and took up positions on Jackson’s right flank. The Fourteenth, under the command of Brigadier General John Hatch, attacked “...advancing and forming...as on dress parade...but a sudden enfilading fire of musketry from the woods...held by Longstreet, wilted the regiment like some invisible breath of plague”.²⁶ The Fourteenth was hit hard, with Colonel Fowler being severely wounded in the action. The next day an advancing Pennsylvania soldier creep forward among the dead and wounded of the previous night battle. He said it was “a pretty but sad sight. Dead chasseurs of the 14th Brooklyn dotted the ground, their large red trousers and blue jackets presenting a pretty picture-from a distance. But close up, he remembered, it was sad to gaze upon their cold pale faces”.²⁷

²⁴ US War Dept, *The War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, (Washington DC: Govt printing office 1888)Series I Volume, 443. (Hereafter cited as OR. Unless otherwise noted, all references to OR are from series I.)

²⁵ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth* , 34.

²⁶ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth* , 41.

²⁷ John J. Hennessy, *Return to Bull Run* (Reprinted Edition) (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 318.

On September 14, 1862 the Fourteenth lead the brigade attack up the steep slopes at South Mountain. The main body, tucked tight behind their own skirmishes, quickly won the high ground. “The Confederates, furious at the result of the Union attack, strove to push the brigade back down the mountain side, charging with fearful yells, only to be driven back with great loss and in turn charged upon and driven still further back.”²⁸ General Hatch noted, “Major DeBevoise, commanding Fourteenth New York State Militia, gallantly led a gallant regiment, which this day added fresh laurels to those already won”.²⁹ At Antietam two days later the Fourteenth held its place in the line of battle during the entire day, charging and retreating as the lines moved back and forth. They displayed a steadiness and courage unsurpassed by that of any other regiment. It was a bloody fight for the Fourteenth who sustained 31 casualties including some recently arrived recruits. These recruits “had been neither armed or drilled and so were not put into the ranks of the Fourteenth Regiment. In some instances, however, they got possession of arms and took part in the fighting”.³⁰

From November 18th to December 6th the Fourteenth marched toward Fredericksburg. They played a minor role in this fight but they were under heavy fire on December 12th and 13th with the regiment however, exhibiting its usual mettle.

In January 1863 the regiment participated in General Burnside’s “mud march” which “turned out to be the worst kind of a fiasco”.³¹ The Fourteenth did not take well to poor leadership. They had already suffered under Pope. Now Burnside was making their lives miserable. They wanted leaders who cared about them. They longed for the days when General McClellan would ride up and say, “How are you Brooklyn, 14th”. They were willing to die for leaders they deemed as competent commanders, such as their Regimental Commanders, General McDowell, and later Grant. In their minds, they had worked hard to learn their craft. It was not too much to

²⁸ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth* , 45.

²⁹ *OR*, Vol. 19, 221.

³⁰ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth* , 48.

³¹ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth* , 61.

ask for superiors to apply themselves to their profession in order not to waste men's time and lives.

On April 28, 1863 the regiment marched to Chancellorsville. Deployed as skirmishers, they fought bravely, exhausting all their ammunition. Simultaneously the Confederates were making it impossible for the Union pontoon corps to lay a bridge over the Rappahannock. The Division Commander knew the crossing was vital "...and it was the tried and true red-legged veterans that the officer turned...at a given signal, with a wild yell of defiance the men rushed...It was something like running an engine to a fire in old Brooklyn, at first-they vastly different...men falling...bullets ...singing like swarms of angry bees about their ears...they pressed onward...reached the river and launched the boats".³² The subsequent loss of the battle surprised the Fourteenth because it seemed that everywhere they were, the army was winning.

On July 1, 1863, while under command of General Lysander Cutler, the regiment pushed forward along the Emmitsburg turnpike. They could see and hear the events unfolding in Gettysburg. "It looked like serious work ahead, and every man's veins swelled and pulsed with the thought of what he was going into."³³ They formed in line of battle at Seminary ridge. After General Reynolds was killed they helped carry him off the field and some of the Fourteenth's men saved his cap and equipment. As the Confederates in Davis' Brigade began to flank the federal position Colonel Fowler, commanding both the Fourteenth and the 95th New York Volunteers, ordered a charge. Along with the Sixth Wisconsin they vigorously attacked and defeated the rebels near the railroad cut. The regiment then moved to reinforce Second Division who was to tie in with the Eleventh Corps. As the Eleventh Corps broke, the Fourteenth, Sixth Wisconsin and Battery B put up stubborn resistance to the determined Confederate advances, buying time for the rest of the Army to occupy key terrain so critical to their success the

³² Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth* , 67.

³³ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth* , 81.

following days. After fighting their way through the town the regiment occupied Culp's Hill, which formed the extreme right of the army. At night they moved to support Greene's brigade. Near Spangler's Spring they engaged Confederates who had pierced the Union lines. This chance meeting engagement and the prompt action of Colonel Fowler probably saved the Army of Potomac the loss of its reserve ammunition and train, or a most disastrous flank movement. During day three, the Fourteenth fought for seven hours, the men "staggering through the heat and smoke of battle, red-eyed, gasping, but indomitable".³⁴ The Confederate dead bodies stacked up in front of their lines demonstrated the regiment's effectiveness. After the fight, some of the Confederates rightly called Culp's Hill the "Hill of Death".³⁵

On October 30, 1863 Union efforts to cross a small water obstacle had met with Confederate sharpshooters. To force the passage "the red-legs charged over drove the enemy from the pits...the very daring of this movement, at best nothing but a forlorn hope, proved its success. Stunned, seemingly by such audacity" the Confederates retreated.³⁶

With less than one month remaining on their obligated service, the Fourteenth fought at the Wilderness on May 6, 1864. The fighting was the fiercest the men of the Fourteenth had so far experienced. As Longstreet attempted to turn the Union left flank, the veterans of the Fourteenth calmed the newer recruits and held their ground.

On May 8th, near the Spottsylvania Court House, the Fourteenth advanced to a burning farmhouse known as Alosop's. The Confederates' fire, the heat of the day and the burning house took its toll but the Fourteenth fought well, including the new recruits who received a cheer from the veterans. The following day brought heavy skirmish actions and an attack at noon through a "dead man's land. At 6:25 in the afternoon they were ordered to attack the enemy's works.

³⁴ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth*, 98.

³⁵ Herbert O. Brown and Dwight V. Nitz, *Fields of Glory* (Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 1990), 61.

³⁶ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth*, 108.

“Each face was like a stone...in five minutes they were to face almost certain death. Not a man flinched, each seemed to be as cool as if waiting for the evening parade.”³⁷ Relief came when the order was countermanded, but shortly later, countermanded again. The Fourteenth charged. Sixty-one men were killed and wounded. They charged again on the morning of the 12th, and then for the next nine days it was a continual skirmish night and day.

Arriving at Massaponax Church they started to prepare for the trip home. While most mustered out of the service a number of the men continued to serve. Transferred to the 5th New York State Veteran Infantry, they fought up to the war’s conclusion at Appomattox Court House.

³⁷ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth* , 121.

CHAPTER 3

The Marine Corps has always been successful transforming young men into capable fighters. We use recruit training to strip away the remnants of civilian life while injecting military discipline and teamwork. We rely on follow on schools to sharpen individual and unit skills to a point where the new Marines can function properly in their first hostile engagement. This process takes between six to eight months. It is remarkable that the Red-Legged Devils were proficient in their first battle at Bull Run only thirteen weeks after the regiment mustered. These thirteen weeks were filled with recruitment, drilling and good-byes. Logic dictates that the regiment needed more time to prepare for the demands of combat, yet this transformation from civilian to soldier was successful. Fort Sumter was fired upon on April 12, 1861. Thirteen weeks later on July 21st, the soldiers of the Fourteenth Brooklyn charged into history. Bank clerks, firemen, boys barely out of school, led by inexperienced NCOs and officers, faced the horror of musket and cannon fire. As others gave into the fear and chaos of this first battle, the Fourteenth found their niche as fighters. To find out how this was possible we must look to life before the war.

The success of the Fourteenth Regiment at Bull Run and subsequent battles is directly related to the communities that sheltered and influenced the young Brooklyn men. These communities were instrumental in nurturing the zeal of the recruits and cementing the resolve of the regiment through the following three years of hard fighting. Initially, the influence of immigration provided the framework on which the development of community values was nurtured. Through the years, a collective social conscious took shape. Once solidified, the values, beliefs and opinions of the community translated to a set of social expectations that came to be the driving force behind the soldiers desire to serve in the Army. Also present in the community was the

“...Victorian concept of courage, honor and masculinity...” which taunted the manhood of the young men.³⁸ These social influences drove men to fight and left little room for anyone to avoid the oncoming war.

Brooklyn’s history tells the story of America. “Over one out of seven Americans has roots in Brooklyn.”³⁹ For the millions who took the perilous journey to a strange land, drawn by the chance for unconditional freedom, Brooklyn was a point of entry and eventual home to many. The city embraced diversity, protected religious freedoms, provided education, and opened the gates to fulfilling dreams. The immigrants came to a country that would protect their individual rights of expression, religion, creativity, and quest for betterment. In return for being a safe haven and a true “melting pot”, Brooklyn was rewarded by the varied experiences and rich talents of the new comers. In this unspoken mutual relationship, the city and the people flourished.

The communities that arose were a rich hybrid of traditional American values made stronger by the immigrant experience. Over time, the immigrants established themselves and became new “protectors” of American ideals and values. This is one of the key elements, the foundation that strengthened the resolve of the communities as 1861 approached. Now that their way of life was threatened, the communities were ready to fight to preserve the freedoms they had come to cherish. The Fourteenth was not the only unit to be impacted by the immigrant influence. The Civil War saw immigrants from both the North and South taking up arms to defend their beliefs. For example, Brooklyn had the mostly German 54th Regiment known as the “Schwartz Jaeger” and the 155th Regiment, known as the “Irish Legion”. In the South, the “Confederacy’s 1st

³⁸ Piston and Hatcher, *Wilson’s Creek*, 3.

³⁹ Merlis and Israelowitz, *Welcome Back to Brooklyn*, 7.

Louisiana probably holds the record for the most cosmopolitan outfit in the war, with 37 different nationalities represented in the ranks”.⁴⁰

In the 1800’s, local communities throughout the country had varied levels of social maturity. The onset of the Civil War suddenly demanded a heightened sense of community awareness and self-evaluation in both the North and South. With the engagement at Fort Sumter, time had run out for further changes or adjustments to the social fabric of the communities. All communities were now victim to the forces and beliefs that had previously shaped their identity. Brooklyn was no exception. Its communities had to quickly push to the forefront what they considered valuable and important in life to uncover whether the war meant total commitment, avoidance, or something in between. The Chaplain of the Regiment, Rev Dr. Farley, captured Brooklyn’s strong values and opinions favoring the preservation of the Union. He stated, “The government of this country is entitled to the hearty support, sympathy and cooperation of the people of this land in the present crisis of the national fortunes.”⁴¹ The fact that he delivered his speech wearing a blue military frock and sword was in itself an expression of the attitude of the community.

The unwavering belief that the Union must remain intact was manifested into the character of the community. The community became the conscious and the voice of the people. The views of the community became more important than individual opinions and acted as a beacon for the masses to follow. Within this reasoning, when the community dedicated itself to the war, it was naturally expected that the men would fight. Men would go to war not because they were from Brooklyn, but rather because they were part of a Brooklyn community that expected them to fight and die if necessary. Parents gave their children to the cause. As one father wrote, “...You tell us in your letter that you have listed for the conflict. We will ever hope that the great ruler

⁴⁰ Nofi, *The Civil War Notebook* , 39.

above will overrule the affairs of this nation, and that we will have peace without bloodshed. I commend you, my son, for standing up for our liberty.”⁴² Many men “...enlisted at the urging of some prominent member of their hometown.”⁴³ Employers willingly gave up their best workers while the community marshaled the required resources. The expectation of the local communities found their way to print. Headlines in the local papers called out, “To Arms! To Arms! Recruits! Recruits! Brooklyn Chasseurs-14th Regiment”.⁴⁴ Articles challenged the men. “Now, come on young men, and join...The regiment may be ordered to the war and it may not...but you must go, one way or the other, and it is for you to say whether you will join a regiment of your choice, or be bundled off under commanders you know nothing about.”⁴⁵ In the end, the community left few excuses for any man of military age to remain at home. Men feared staying at home would harm their personal and professional reputations. They did not want to face the inevitable shame in not fighting. As the war dragged on the soldiers maintained their sense of community identity. The Fourteenth Brooklyn was no longer just a nickname but the soldiers “...primary identification, a bond with the home community”.⁴⁶ This attitude was prevalent throughout New York. All together, New York sent 809 companies of infantry, 114 of cavalry, 65 of artillery, and 18 of engineers to the Union war effort. In fact, “nearly one-third of the 2,952 Union men killed or injured at First Bull Run were from New York City”.⁴⁷

It was an issue of “manhood” for the men. The macho image was alive and well. The men were expected to be tough without exception. The concept of manhood was ingrained in the men. Now it was time to turn this image into deeds. The following soldier best summed up the

⁴¹ “The Academy of Music a House of Prayer-Spirit Stirring Address of the Chaplin-Great Enthusiasm”, *Brooklyn Eagle*, 8 May 1861.

⁴² “State of Affairs at Noon”, from a father to member of Company F, *Brooklyn Eagle*, 8 May 1861.

⁴³ Piston and Hatcher, *Wilson’s Creek*, 6.

⁴⁴ “The Feeling in the City”, *Brooklyn Eagle*, 17 May 1861.

⁴⁵ “What Brooklyn Has Done and What She Must Do”, *Brooklyn Eagle*, 30 June 1861.

⁴⁶ Piston and Hatcher, *Wildson’s Creek*, 7.

⁴⁷ Nofi, *The Civil War Notebook*, 40.

attitude; “We expect to leave here soon and the rumor is that we are to go to Harper’s Ferry. If so, we will soon have some hot work-for I am not one of those to believe that the South is going to yield without a struggle-and that struggle will be one of life and death. I hope you will hear a good account of the 14th. I don’t think there is a man in the regiment that would show the white feather. The officers and men...are determined to do or die.”⁴⁸

One thing that was not on the men’s mind was abolition. Early in the war one of the soldiers mockingly wrote, “...our scouting party...captured three darkies...Col Wood kindly takes them in to do camp duty, and today the glorious 14th Regiment is a slaveholder”.⁴⁹ Later, when one soldier returned from leave, he captured the feelings of the other men. He wrote, “All they seem to care about now is to get home for they say the ‘President’s Emancipation Proclamation’ has turned this war into a ‘negro war’ and that we are not fighting for the preservation of the Union, but the freement of niggers and that they did not come out for that purpose and want to go home.”⁵⁰ As men whose families had immigrated to this country, it seems that they would be a bit more sensitive to the plight of the slaves, or anyone who was being persecuted. This is not to suggest the men were immoral. Rather, their attitude was representative of the culture of the day. To see it as anything more would be unjust. As we today are held victim of our cultural leanings, the men of the Fourteenth were hostage to the conditions that shaped their beliefs.

⁴⁸ Letter of William T. Williamson, Co D, to the editor of the *Brooklyn Eagle*, written at Washington City on 20 May 1861.

⁴⁹ Letter of Private Dunerath, to the editor of the *Brooklyn Eagle*, written at Washington Heights, 4 June 1861.

⁵⁰ Letter of John Vliet, to his former employer Charles Collins, reprinted in the *Brooklyn Eagle*, written while at Camp Reynolds, Belle Plains Virginia, 1 Feb 1863.

CHAPTER 4

The defense of the United States has been based in large part on the concept of the civilian who prepares for active service during peacetime and becomes a soldier-at-arms in times of national emergency. This concept, originated in England, then adopted in 1636 by the Massachusetts Bay colony, has served this country well. The obvious advantage is the associated cost saving. By having militia units on-call, the strength of the regular army can be kept to a minimum during peacetime. But beyond the cost savings lies the true advantage of a militia. The militia serves as an integral part of community life. “The militia meeting halls...of many of the towns became the center of not only military, but also civic and social activities”.⁵¹ As the focal point of the community, a militia unit brings about closer ties between the soldiers and their local communities.

As “citizen soldiers”, the Fourteenth Regiment had significantly closer ties to the people than their regular army counterparts. The militia was a secondary responsibility for the Brooklyn soldiers. The majority of their time was spent side by side with the ordinary citizens as family, friends, and co-workers. When the call to war was sounded, it was not nebulous, faceless formations marching to the front. It was men who were woven into the everyday fabric of society. Their departure had deep emotional pull on the entire community. Family lives and work places were disrupted as the men were stripped away to fight. In the regular army, often times the “army” is the soldier’s family. In the militia, the “community” is his family. For those left behind, the link to the war is personal. They can relate to someone at the front. This bond inspires them to do anything possible to aid the soldiers. Whether committed to the cause or not, they are drawn into the conflict through their personal association with the fighters.

⁵¹ Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, *The Reserve Components of the United States Armed Forces* (Washington DC: Department of Defense, June 1994), 5.

Through words, deeds, prayers or money, the citizens of Brooklyn were engaged as strongly as the soldiers. The *Brooklyn Eagle*, one of the local newspapers, was full of correspondence between soldiers and the citizens, elected officials' accounts of their visits to the front lines and miscellaneous editorials. Mostly, the paper was full of local citizens support for the troops. They wanted to know how they could help the "boys". What did they need at the front? Who was hurt or killed?

The people took it upon themselves to help the recruiting effort by offering money as an incentive. The social forces and the patriotic spirit of the men were the main reasons the Fourteenth's ranks filled so quickly, but the extra money was accepted as a token of mutual respect between soldier and citizen. The citizens were proud to help. Mrs. H.P. Smith must have been happy when she read in the paper that her "contribution of \$100 for the first ten recruits for the 14th regiment has been distributed...".⁵²

The community pushed hard to provide for the soldiers' stay behind families. Unlike today's armed forces where the spouse and family live on base or post, the families of the Brooklyn militia were "next door". A walk down a Brooklyn street between 1861 and 1863 would reveal a family, living day to day, while the husband, father or brother was off fighting. This constant visible reminder of the sacrifice of the entire family drove Brooklyn to be "one of the very few counties in the State that undertook to provide for the families of the volunteers. The effect...was in fact to double the pay of the soldier who was encumbered with a family".⁵³

In addition to caring for the individual soldiers and their families, Brooklyn cared for the regiment. The newspaper is flooded with stories capturing the communities' show of support for the Fourteenth. In one case, "A stand of colors was presented the 14th Regiment by Mrs. Barbara

⁵² "The 'Eagle' Enlistment Fund," *Brooklyn Eagle*, 27 August 1862.

⁵³ "What Brooklyn has Done and What She Has to Do," *Brooklyn Eagle*, 30 June 1862.

Walton on behalf of the ladies residing in the vicinity of orange and Willow streets”.⁵⁴ Dozens of citizens adopted individual companies. Prior to their departure, “Company H was presented a beautiful silken flag, the gift of some lady residents of Adelphi Street”.⁵⁵ The community obviously cared for the men and had high expectations for them. The Reverend Beecher summed up the feeling of Brooklyn when he made an address “to the members of the company, hoping they would if necessary, represent with honor and credit the City of Churches”.⁵⁶

The respect and caring of the people instilled higher virtue in the soldiers. The soldiers knew they had the backing of the people and they knew they would have to produce results. It resulted in their sober determination to fight hard. After receiving a national banner from the citizens, Captain Burnett vowed, “That as loyal citizens and soldiers we pledge our lives and fortunes, and our sacred honor for the protection of that banner, promising ‘no traitor’ shall ever pollute those stars under which our forefathers fought, bled and died”.⁵⁷ Another soldier wrote, “The confidence of the people will not be abused”.⁵⁸ All this support and expectations from the public helped mold the regiment’s esprit d’ corps, which would be so critical in the upcoming battles. This esprit would carry them through times of fear and inspire them to bold, heroic deeds.

The high water mark for the citizens’ attachment to their militia occurred on May 18, 1861, the day the Fourteenth marched off to war. “The huzzas of the people who thronged the sidewalks and streets...attested the general interest and sympathy in a regiment in which the ranks were the representatives of the first families of the ‘City of Churches’...To Fulton street and thence to the ferry...they embarked for Jersey City”⁵⁹ “The multitude on the wharves waved and shouted their good-byes to the eight hundred of Brooklyn’s gallant sons who thus departed

⁵⁴ “Flag Presentation,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, 17 May 1861.

⁵⁵ “The Star Spangled Banner,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, 18 May 1861.

⁵⁶ “The War Excitement,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, 8 May 1861.

⁵⁷ “Company C 14th Regiment,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, May 1861.

⁵⁸ Same as Note 48.

⁵⁹ Tevis and Marquis, *Welcome Back to Brooklyn*, 18.

to interpose their breasts as a living wall between their beloved homes and danger.”⁶⁰ The community would continue their support for the regiment throughout the war. During their three years absence, the regiment continued to receive emotional and financial support. The follow on recruits were also taken into the hearts of the people. They would arrive in the field with the same esprit d’ corps as the veterans, thanks to the commitment of the community for their beloved Fourteenth Regiment.

The Fourteenth Regiment’s success as a militia unit helped set the stage for future use of reserve forces. Today’s Total Force Policy has a similar objective to maintain as small an active force as national security permits, but depends on the integration of the capabilities and strengths of the reserve forces. The Marine Corps itself has seen a dramatic increase in their reserve forces’ requirement to fill peacetime and combat operational responsibilities. Perhaps it is the militia’s success in 1861 that reminds us of the need for an able reserve force to achieve our global objectives.

⁶⁰ Tevis and Marquis, *Welcome Back to Brooklyn* , 212.

CHAPTER 5

“Six hundred and twenty thousand Americans died in the Civil War; more Americans than in all other wars since added together...For \$13 a month, (\$11 a month is you were a Confederate private) these farmers and clerks...lawyer and laborers took what they thought would be a few months off from the boredom of everyday life...and went off to The Great Adventure they’d always read about, never expecting to descend into the only living hell man creates on earth.”⁶¹ Caught up in this spirit of the Great Adventure, the Fourteenth Regiment attracted their share of adventurous patriots. Little did they realize that of their ranks, 717 would be casualties.

New York recruits were often stereotyped as social outcasts, unable to find a niche in civilian society. There was a general impression that any soldier from the city must be a hooligan, bent on finding a bottle of whiskey, with a distain for authority and short tempered. They were considered the type of men who would spend most of their time in the stockade, only to be released when a fight was underway. This was true in only a few cases. The 53rd New York, known as “The d’Epineuil Zouaves”, recruited in August of 1861 for three year service, “proved so full of goldbrickers, drunks, brawlers and rowdies that it was discharged the following March”.⁶² The Fourteenth Brooklyn was just the opposite. They were patriotic, spirited and talented young men. The only thing they had in common with the stereotypes was their desire and ability to fight.

The Brooklyn soldiers were of the highest caliber. Those who were already joined and those who came to fill the ranks were the best the city had to offer. For the pre-war soldiers, their peacetime involvement with the militia indicates they were men who already believed in protecting this nation. They were working class people with family commitments, yet they made

⁶¹ Mark Nesbitt, *Ghosts of Gettysburg* (Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 1991), 11.

⁶² Nofi, *The Civil War Notebook*, 55.

time to serve. They were men of character and quality who were held in high regard by the other citizens. They had adventurous spirits and an abundance of talent. As militiamen they encouraged each other as individuals and strove for perfection as a unit. They created the strong nucleus that would be essential to the regiment's wartime success. The new recruits had the raw materials to be excellent fighters. It took a minimal amount of time to transform them into proficient soldiers who could compliment the more experienced men.

In 1861, these Brooklyn men faced a potential disaster, a weakening of the nation they loved so much. It is not important to scrutinize the pros and cons of the Southern states rights to secede or the North's need to maintain the Union. What is important to understand is that the men who took up the "call to arms" put the good of the country before their own interests. The average Brooklynite, soon to turn soldier, would enlist because of principle and "...he who fights for an ideal fights harder and does more than other men because he has put all considerations of self behind him".⁶³ As discussed earlier, social forces had shaped their personal ideology. When the war kicked off their convictions impressed upon them the righteousness of keeping the Union together. They believed in the moral legitimacy of the Northern cause. It was a high-minded view, almost innocent in its purity.

Historians often dwell on the "Southern cause", the right to self-government afforded by the constitution. No doubt, the Southern soldier believed in self-destiny. They were excellent soldiers made better by their insatiable connection to a higher calling. There is no issue with this. Frankly, they deserve praise for their single-mindedness. What is a shortfall in the general historical after actions is the impression that the North did not match the Confederates zeal. This misconception stems from the New York riots in 1863. A small number, mostly newly arrived immigrants, protested against the inequality of the draft. The rich could buy a

⁶³ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth*, 4.

“replacement”, whereas the poor, unable to pay, were involuntarily dragged into service. It appears the issue was “fairness”, not the virtue of the war. Citizens anxious to serve easily outweighed this small percentage. The Brooklyn recruits clearly matched the *Espirit de Corps* found in the Confederacy. They did not rely on the production capability of the north. On the battlefield they would have the same equipment man for man. They would fire and absorb bullets just as the Confederates would. They had the same desire to “see it through”. Strip away the political backdrop, the generalship, and logistics, the Brooklyn men were as patriotic, eager, scared, and committed to the cause, as were the Confederates.

The young men who enlisted in the Fourteenth Regiment came from varied heritages. Most had English, Irish and German backgrounds but were born in this country. There was a sprinkling of Italians, Poles and even Portuguese. These tended to be more recent arrivals. The Fourteenth’s War Roster begins with Thomas Abbott. He enlisted at age 22. He was wounded at Antietam, promoted to sergeant and wounded again at Spotsylvania. The last man is Ferdinand Zellinsky, age 23. Mustered in as a private in Company A, promoted to corporal, he was finally discharged for disability in February 1863. Between these names are 32 Smith’s, 6 White’s, and 6 Williams’s. Remaining names highlight the diversity of the regiment while their combat history shows their sacrifice. William DeBevoise was a Lieutenant Colonel. Ramon Cardona was a respected officer. Dayton Geissellman was discharged for disabilities in 1863. Martin Van Brunt was wounded at the Wilderness then died later in May of 1864. Patrick Flaherty, age 40, was wounded at Reynolds Crossing then died of disease in July of 1864. Josiah Grumman, mustered in as a First Sergeant then promoted to Second Lieutenant, was captured at Falls Church, paroled, promoted to First Lieutenant, then wounded at Manassas and died in September of 1862. Jacob Dietz was wounded and captured at Bull Run then died in October of

1861. Alonso Gildersleeve was a musician who unfortunately deserted in May of 1863. Samuel Hawthorne was wounded at Gettysburg. Earnest Kerchieffer was killed at Bull Run.

The enlisted men of the Fourteenth were well educated. Once, after being paid, the paymaster remarked, "...they were the most intelligent soldiers he had seen since the beginning of the campaign. Every man in the regiment excepting three signed his name, a thing uncommon among soldiers and in a style of chirography highly creditable".⁶⁴ The officers possessed bright minds along with their leadership skills. Small wonder that its commander, Colonel Wood, was elected Mayor in 1864 and then in 1887 he was United States Consul to a European power, through an appointment under President Cleveland.

Both the officers and enlisted were urban men, more comfortable with the fast paced changes in industry than in the woods. Shortly after the battle at Bull Run they were tasked to cut down trees. It must have been a pathetic sight because the commanding officer noted, "'Although good for almost everything, our men were not good at falling trees. A Fourteener, after gnawing at a tree opposite his head for half an hour, would have to give way to some countryman who, coming along would take pity on him and show him how...a tree should be felled'. When called to his attention, a superior officer responded, 'That is so, but I know what they can do. They can be depended on to fight. I will relieve them from duty...and detail them for pickets.'"⁶⁵ It remained this way for the rest of the war. The Fourteenth gained a superb reputation as pickets, an honor they relished.

There was a high level of testosterone in the ranks. The men were energetic, athletic types who enjoyed the regiment's emphasis on physical fitness. Prior to the war many of the men had a close association to the Brooklyn Fire Engine Companies. This indicates that they were hearty men, eager for danger, and excited by cheating death. It is reasonable to state they would see the

⁶⁴ "Payment of Troops", *The Brooklyn Eagle*, 28 July 1861.

⁶⁵ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth*, 238.

challenge of combat as a new opportunity to experience the thrill of the action once more. For the others, most of their civilian jobs were not time consuming and physically fatiguing. Whereas a farmer worked non-stop from sunup to sundown, the Fourteenth's men had no outlet for their pent up adrenaline. Like most urban people today they turned to sports as a release. An officer recounted, "In the afternoon, the part of the regiment not on duty would play ball. We had many expert ball players among our men, and they soon raised a nine which whitewashed the nines of all the country regiments which we were brigaded."⁶⁶ After one such victory, a rival Colonel challenged the Fourteenth to something "'more manly- running for instance...not a hundred yard race, such as they run in Brooklyn, but something which will give a chance for the display of endurance, such as a ten- mile race'. With a professional athlete in his unit, this Colonel was confident. After hearing of the bet, the professional athlete told his commander, '...go back and pay the forfeit...they've got Grindell in the Fourteenth'. Grindell, the 'American Deer'...raced against Indians and Englishmen and was always victorious'. He was useful in a fight too. After volunteering to reconnoiter enemy lines he ran in and 'came dancing out again in a few minutes, laughing and lugging behind him a rebel with a coffee pot.'⁶⁷

The soldiers were talented musicians and singers. They were excellent musicians and good singers. It appears that if they desired, many could have been professional musicians. While the regiment was assigned as provost guard the "Fourteenth Regiment Opera Troupe made its bow to the public...The Culpepper academy of Music was crowded during the 'regular first class, high grade minstrel performance'. Almost every general officer in the army, as well as all the men of the nearby regiments, to say nothing of the citizens of the surrounding territory, attended one or all of these concerts".⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth* , 194.

⁶⁷ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth* , 195.

⁶⁸ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth* , 109.

They were humorous, enterprising men who loved to explore. During the winter encampments, “Tin stoves were used in the huts...and the boys would throw cartridges down the chimney after first extracting the balls. The explosion would very soon empty a tent of its occupants and distribute the contents around in great disorder”.⁶⁹ While the regiment was encamped at Arlington Heights, a man came from Washington with a barrel of cider to sell. He made the mistake of putting the back of the barrel up against a tent. “One of the boys entered this and secretly bored a hole in the back end of the barrel. Then while the sulter was busy drawing cider in front, the boys helped themselves from the tap made in the tent. Almost everyone got a good drink...before the trick was discovered.”⁷⁰ The regiment gained a reputation as sightseers; some might say scavengers, scouring any new area from top to bottom. “As soon as the ranks were broken the enterprising spirit of the men of the Fourteenth was manifested by their being everywhere about the town. They overran the Court House, even its belfry, and one was observed on the top of its bell tower, calmly taking a view of the surrounding country. Relics were sought to send home, many amusing private letters to rebel soldiers were unearthed, and the brilliant uniform of the regiment could be seen in all parts of the town and the surrounding country. An attack was made by them on some beehives...They secured the honey, but the bees made them pay dearly for it.”⁷¹

They men prided themselves on their fighting ability. Years later a soldier recounted, “There used to be many interesting encounters in the squared circle. One fight I remember was between Boylan and O’Connor. We went out into the woods, a ring was formed, the contestants stripped and went at it for all they were worth.”⁷² O’Connor was later killed at the Second Bull Run and

⁶⁹ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth* , 135.

⁷⁰ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth* , 153.

⁷¹ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth* , 226.

⁷² Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth* , 154.

Boylan was wounded at Manassas. While in camp one time the Fourteenth was refitted with fresh uniforms. Another unit made the mistake of calling the Fourteenth “Bandbox Soldiers”. They just could not believe that the men who wore bright uniforms, clean shirts and paper collars could fight, “and they said so in a picturesque assortment of terms. But they were shown their mistake. It was amply proved to them that the pluck and muscle could be found as well under clean clothes as dirty ones”.⁷³

The Fourteenth, already a tight organization, became inextricably bonded by the tremendous physical and emotional agony they experienced. Hardship always breeds camaraderie among soldiers. Marine reunions bear witness to the lasting bond. Men who have not seen each other in years instantly reconnect to the emotions they shared under trying times. No doubt, the men of the Fourteenth suffered. During the cold night at Fredericksburg the “...the Brigade formed long lines of officers and men together, who lay down on their oilcloths spoon-fashion to keep each other warm. When the side next to the ground got to the freezing point, the command ‘about face’ was given and the whole line of men rolled over together, to lie a while on the other side. The hail of shot from the Rebel batteries seemed to fly about a foot above the heads of the soldiers. Few, therefore, dared venture to arise”.⁷⁴ Brothers John and William Egolf were wounded at the railroad cut in Gettysburg. While in the hospital “one was nursed back to life and as the color again mantled his wane cheek, he saw his brother pass into the dark valley by the most awful and dreaded death...gangrene, which had supervened in his wound limb with all the tears of hideous pain”.⁷⁵ A soldier in an adjacent unit recalled, “Once when waiting near a Brooklyn regiment...reputed to be a ‘Bully fighting regiment’ ...a musket ball struck a tree and glanced downward into the breast of one of the men...He immediately gave a piercing scream

⁷³ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth* , 33.

⁷⁴ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth* , 57.

⁷⁵ Gregory A. Coco, *Killed in Action* (Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 1992), 18.

which tore into the hearts of the thousands about him...those who heard that piercing cry knew it was only the mortal expression of the terrible agony of a young heart as the cords were breaking which bound it to the loved ones at home. His companions bore him tenderly away..."⁷⁶

⁷⁶ *Coco, Killed in Action*, 87.

CHAPTER 6

Today we can boast about the heroics of the Red-Legged Devils. They deserve the accolades history and their present admirers bestow upon them. But when searching for answers to what made them so good during the fight, we must look to their non-battle actions. What set the Fourteenth apart from the majority of their Civil War partners was their absolute belief in, and desire for training. Their long-term combat efficiency was directly linked to their emphasis on training. The men of the Fourteenth understood then, as we understand today, that the two basic functions of the military are to wage and prepare for war. To be good at waging war one must train relentlessly to “develop forces that can win in combat.”⁷⁷ From their infant days as a militia, the regiment emphasized training. As the war became a reality, they continued to set training as the top priority. The regiment concentrated on individual soldier skills and collective training to hone instinctive qualities. In addition, they implemented a Professional Military Education system to improve original thought. While other regiments may have considered training a necessary evil, the Fourteenth’s men sought it, learned it, and respected it.

Basic individual skills are an essential foundation for combat effectiveness and must receive heavy emphasis. From the start the Fourteenth focused on the mechanics of firing weapons and individual drilling skills. They honed their skills until the moves became instinctive. Today we would call this “muscle memory”. By either name, the end result is the same. Eventually, the need for conscious thought is diminished and is replaced by reflex actions. This is essential in combat because as the chaos of the battle overwhelms a man’s senses, pre-programmed muscles must take over.

⁷⁷ United States Marine Corps, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1, *Warfighting* (Washington DC: Department of the Navy, June 1997), 59. (Cited hereafter as MCDP 1.)

As a newly formed regiment, the Fourteenth knew there was much work ahead, but all available reference materials indicate they could hardly wait to start. When the Fourteenth made their first real camp on the Heights of Washington Park the men appeared to “like it amazingly”, and as the local paper pointed out, “They are now kept under strict discipline and they will soon be as well drilled as any volunteer regiment in the service.”⁷⁸ They set an initial goal of equaling their army counterparts. Their efforts paid off as noted by the local paper, “They have now been drilled more than any regiment that has left the city, and are in the state of efficiency which is highly commendable and credible to the officers in charge, who have been ceaseless in their exertions to make the regiment equal to any other that can be produced anywhere.”⁷⁹ During the grand inspection by President Lincoln and General Scott, the regiment performed well and had the honor of the right of the line. General Scott took Colonel Wood by the hand and said, “Colonel, I am proud of you and your regiment-they are intelligent looking men, and their marching is excellent”.⁸⁰ While in Washington one soldier wrote, “I do not think the 14th will be sent away from here for the present at least, as I have heard that we are the only regiment about here that is perfected in ‘Field Movements’ ...”.⁸¹ As their precision grew, so did their confidence. Whether out of their pride, or maybe fear of losing the attention, the regiment maintained their emphasis on the basic soldiering skills.

The regiment quickly graduated to collective training which consists of drills and exercises. Again they seemed to enjoy the experience. “We drill the ‘Skirmish drill’ and ‘Bayonet Exercise’” wrote one soldier. “It keeps one studying continually; we have ‘target practice’ as well which is just what the boys like.”⁸² General Zinni, one of the finest combat veterans in the Marine Corps, always stressed the need for constant training even after a unit experienced

⁷⁸ “The Fourteenth in Camp”, *Brooklyn Eagle* 15 May 1861.

⁷⁹ “The Fourteenth to go at Last”, *Brooklyn Eagle*, 16 May 1861.

⁸⁰ “Camp Wood”, *Brooklyn Eagle*, 2 June, 1861.

⁸¹ Vliet, written while at Camp Wood on 16 June 1861. *Brooklyn Eagle*

combat. The Fourteenth adhered to this principle. One soldier recalled when an officer had his brigade out one day on the “skeleton”, and the next day on Brigade drill. He said, “The skeleton is a queer thing: we cut four poles, which will do for a company, by a man taking hold of each end of the pole; then four or eight men march between the two ends, so that a company sometimes consists only of 10 men, the rest being out on picket on guard duty. This drill is for the benefit of the company officers particularly.” In one of the few instances of disgust, one soldier wrote that there are some “...in our regiment who cannot drill a company in the ‘Manual’ and I doubt very much whether some of our officers ever saw a musket before. This language is not in accordance with the ‘Army Regulations’ but the truth must be spoken nevertheless if one does suffer for talking against his officers.”⁸³ There is nothing wrong with this. It is obvious he was not content to be mediocre. He did not want a few incompetents to poison the regiment.

“Professional Military Education is designed to develop creative, thinking leaders.”⁸⁴ Outside of West Point, there were no formal educational establishments available in the 1860’s. The responsibility for implementing an educational plan resided with the officers, particularly the commanding officers. The Fourteenth was fortunate to have officers that understood the importance of working through tactical problems as a way to improve their own decision making skills and that of the other officers and soldiers. As one soldier wrote, “Night before last our Colonel commenced a school for the purpose of the theoretical instruction in Military Tactics; it is the best idea that has yet been carried out, for if one gets theoretical knowledge thoroughly, he has a good opportunity to put it into practice in active service.”⁸⁵ The Fourteenth had the good fortune to have quality commanders who understood the value of PME. This may stem from the emphasis on military education within the New York State’s National Guard. They had

⁸² Vliet, written at Camp Marion Upton Hill, 14 February 1862. *Brooklyn Eagle*.

⁸³ “Interesting From the Fourteenth Regiment” Camp Marion, Upton Hill, Nov 2, 1861. *Brooklyn Eagle*.

⁸⁴ MCDP 1, 61.

⁸⁵ Vliet, written at Camp Reynolds, 15 March 1863. *Brooklyn Eagle*.

organized a professional society for the improvement of themselves and their units. The Military Association of the state held regular meetings to discuss tactics. “For quality and range of military interest, it does not appear that the Regular Army of that day was doing anything of a professional character comparable to the studies of these dedicated citizen soldiers.”⁸⁶

The pre-hostility theoretical training bore fruit in the heat of the battles. Colonel Fowler is a prime example. By Clausewitz definition, Colonel Fowler could be called a “military genius”. He demonstrated “an intellect that, even in the darkest hour, retains some glimmering of the inner light which leads to truth”. Colonel Fowler’s “coup d’oeil”, or “inner eye” was clearly displayed at the railroad cut at Gettysburg. He saw through the “fog of war” and grasped the situation immediately. When he barked out the commands to best position his forces for the attack, he demonstrated the second element of Clausewitz’s “Genius”, that is the “courage to follow this faint light wherever it may lead”.⁸⁷

Training built the foundation for the Fourteenth’s success. As the war continued, training and experience combined to give the Fourteenth keen battlefield savvy. Things did not always work perfectly as when “on one occasion when rallied, one of the soldiers, whose ramrod had become stuck in the musket barrel, fired ramrod and all, bringing down a major of the opposing forces”.⁸⁸ At least he hit the mark. All in all, the training paid dividends. As one observer reported “the army appeared to him vastly different from Bull Run...Now the men looked like business. None of the careless levity, but that somber determined look which true military discipline alone can give-They looked, every man, like the parts of a great machine, and as he looked upon them he felt that now indeed the army was a body.”⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Jim D. Hill, *The Minute Man in Peace and War* (Harrisburg: The Stackpole Company, 1964), 49.

⁸⁷ Clausewitz, *On War*, 102.

⁸⁸ “Telegram Dispatch from Moses F. Odell, Member of Congress”, *Brooklyn Eagle* 23 July 1862.

⁸⁹ “A Trip to Manassas”, speech of Rev Dr. Bellows of New York, reprinted in the *Brooklyn Eagle*, 12 March 1862.

CHAPTER 7

“Regiment” is a term used to describe a military unit below division level. However, in the case of the Fourteenth Regiment, this word transcends its dictionary meaning. To the soldiers of the Fourteenth, their “Regiment” had a mystical hold on their conscious. The spirit of the regiment became a force that permeated the soul of the men, deflated their individuality, and drew them to a higher level of commitment. This spirit was the “aspirations, and emotions, and the sacrifices, and bold deeds, and noble ardors of each of all the individuals combined into one intangible force that leads and inspires and animates and guides.”⁹⁰

This spirit of the regiment could not be seen or touched. As the faithful of a church dedicate themselves to a God they cannot see, the Fourteenth dedicated themselves to the “Regiment”. In essence, it became their military version of faith. This is what made the Fourteenth great and set them apart from most of their peers. The spirit of the regiment became a force multiplier. This military spirit, said Clausewitz, stood “in the same relationship to the parts of an army as does a general’s ability to the whole. The general could give only overall direction. At the point where the separate parts need guidance, the military spirit must take command”.⁹¹ He also points out that an army imbued with true military spirit “maintains its cohesion under the most murderous fire...cannot be shaken by imaginary fears...and will not lose strength...”.⁹²

We may credit individuals for courage and sacrifice but without the spirit of the “Regiment” in them, there would be few heroes. The men gave themselves freely to the “Regiment”. In return, the “Regiment” breathed acceptance and courage into the soldiers. When the normal emotions of combat tried to freeze a man in place, the “Regiment” helped them break through their human frailties and rise to the challenge. The spirit of the regiment became like a parent,

⁹⁰ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth*, 3.

⁹¹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 188.

caring yet demanding. “Mere individuals are subordinate to this spirit which is really the regiment; it accepts their offerings of devotion and of courage, and in return strengthens them for new courage and fresh devotion; but always it is the master, and they are the instruments. Originally a thing of their own creation, it has come to dominate them and to use them for its own clean and idealistic ends; the spirit of the regiment is the master, and if they are worthy they cannot choose but serve.”⁹³

The reaction to belonging to a special regiment will always manifest itself in particular, even peculiar ways. The Marines Corps is a proud bunch. To an outsider, their fascination with Chesty Puller and the reverence given to the Commandant must seem odd, but it works. The Fourteenth Regiment also had some unusual ways to demonstrate their pride. “The pride of soldiers is a strange, inexplicable thing... There were two things the men of the Fourteenth jealousy guarded: their regimental numeral and their red pants.”⁹⁴ The emblem of the Fourteenth was “Baptised by Fire”. Directly after Bull Run, the state authorities changed the Fourteenth’s regimental designation to the Eighty-fourth New York Volunteers. The men hated the new number and immediately took action to avoid being known as the Eighty-fourth while vigorously protesting to General McDowell about the change. Sensing their fanatical determination, the General agreed and stated, “You were mustered by me into the service of the United States as part of the militia of the State of New York known as the Fourteenth. You have been baptized by fire under that number and such you shall be recognized by the United States government and by no other number”.⁹⁵ The Secretary of War later upheld the General’s promise.

Perhaps a more unusual example of the men’s pride was their obsession with their uniforms. In 1860, impressed by the uniforms of Colonel Ellsworth’s Chicago Zouaves, the Board of

⁹² Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth* , 187.

⁹³ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth* , 3.

⁹⁴ 14th Regiment New York State Militia, 1861-1864, Plate No 152. Provided courtesy of Tony DellaRocca.

Officers decided to adopt their own version of the French Chasseurs-a-Pied uniform. “This change of uniform was a progressive step, in conformity with the improvements then being introduced throughout the army...little did the officers of the board dream that the uniform they then adopted would become historic, sung of in poets’ lays and transferred to the artists’ canvas as that of the ‘red-legged devils’.”⁹⁶ It was a bold decision to wear red in combat. Frankly, they were not practical and the bright colors made them prime targets on the battlefield.

At Bull Run the “conspicuous uniform of the regiment attracted the fire of the enemy...”⁹⁷ To the soldiers, the uniforms were more than just pants. They represented the “Regiment”. “The attachment of the men to the red trousers was developed so strongly, when...the colonel, proud of the bright new uniforms...desiring to keep them unsoiled, ordered a change to the blue, or fatigue pants...There was great dissatisfaction with this order...the sediment being that if they were found dead they wanted to have red breeches on, and this decided the colonel never to take the regiment into action unless it wore its distinctive red uniform, of which it had already become so proud...”⁹⁸ The legacy lived on for many years.

In a more ceremonial role than practical, this Civil War uniform inspired the “colorful and distinct dress uniform of blue coat, red trousers and shako worn by the 14th Infantry, New York National Guard before World War II. The color bearers of the regiment wore exact copies of the civil war uniform into modern times.”⁹⁹ An instant comparison can be made to the Marine Corps who are presently phasing in a new uniform. It is the Corps’ attempt to regain its sense of individuality. Some might call it “elitism”, but the change sparks additional pride to the Marines in the same manner that the red trousers gave to the Fourteenth.

⁹⁵ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth* , 187.

⁹⁶ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth* , 213.

⁹⁷ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth* , 229.

⁹⁸ Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth* , 252.

⁹⁹ “14th Brooklyn Regimental History,” URL:<http://www.14thbrooklyn.com/history.htm>>., accessed 2 October 2001.

The company and field grade officers of the Fourteenth Regiment enjoyed the loyalty of the enlisted men. The soldiers would compete to see which unit could best prove their devotion to the officers. As an expression of their respect, the men would often sing for the officers. One soldier wrote, “Last night Company C turned out and serenaded the Colonel before his tent...Tonight we are going to serenade our company commander, and you can just bet all your small change we will do it up brown. We have good singers in our company and they know a song or two”.¹⁰⁰ Maybe the men were not signing for a particular officer but rather the position or billet they held.

The Marines Corps’ relationship between officers and enlisted is strong but different than the relationship within the Fourteenth. The officers of the Fourteenth were automatically deemed as competent. The burden was on the enlisted to prove themselves to the officers. One soldier wrote, “I sorry myself for what I have done and if I had the chance I would go home tomorrow, but I would not disgrace upon myself to go without leave, for I think too much of my honor to do that as the officers put considerable faith in me...”.¹⁰¹ Marines will obey orders, as did the soldiers of the Fourteenth. However, Marine Officers must earn respect and do not automatically enjoy the blind loyalty of their units.

Perhaps the separation between officers and enlisted was so great in the Civil War army that the enlisted rarely got close enough to scrutinize the officers. If the officers represent the best of the regiment, to not honor them would be to not honor the spirit of the regiment. To not blindly honor the officers would invalidate the “spirit of the regiment” concept. The men of the Fourteenth were not willing to do this.

¹⁰⁰ Williamson, written at Camp Wool, Washington D.C., *Brooklyn Eagle*, 2 June 1861.

¹⁰¹ Letter of William C Rae, written at Camp McDowell, *Brooklyn Eagle*, 1 August 1862.

The success of the new recruits in combat can be directly attributed to the veterans who provided “on the job” training. As a general rule, recruits were not put into the ranks until they had quality training time with the experienced veterans. As the original members were killed or wounded, the spirit they had helped developed lived on and by living on it drew “to itself other individuals to take place of those who had fallen from the ranks.”¹⁰²

¹⁰² Tevis and Marquis, *The History of the Fighting Fourteenth*, 4.

CHAPTER 8

The Red-Legged Devils of Brooklyn have a long and envious battle record. The battle streamers so proudly displayed on their unit flag were earned with dedication, courage, and sacrifice. Their success was not by chance. It was a byproduct of five traits. They had strong community values and social expectations that had been imbedded into them all since birth. Starting with its immigrant influence, the Brooklyn communities matured to become a unique place to grow up. These communities valued freedom and could not tolerate any infringement on its ideals. As the war came, the communities expected its men to defend their way of life. Encouraged by the elders, young men felt it was their duty to enlist. There were no excuses to allow the South to dictate terms to the Brooklyn communities. Add to this the Victorian concept of courage, honor and masculinity, the men were eager to fight. Another factor was the close ties of the militia to the local communities. Literally, every soldier that departed left behind dozens of family, friends and co-workers. Their absence was felt deeply in the community. The community opened their hearts and mustered the resources to take care of the soldiers and their families. In return for their community involvement, the soldiers were rewarded by an infusion of strength. The soldiers drew together to honor, or at least not let down, the citizens. This bond manifested itself into a powerful esprit d'corps. This bond was further strengthened by the fact that the individual soldiers were superb in their own right. They were patriotic, adventurous, intelligent, talented and selfless. Their individual compositions facilitated an easy transition to soldiering. The men understood the necessity of training and they loved it. They went well beyond the minimum standards. They expected themselves to be the most proficient unit on the battlefield. Even as the praise rolled in for their precision and the opportunity to rest on their laurels arose, they continued to train diligently. Finally, these selfless soldiers, recruits and

veterans alike, gave themselves freely to the spirit of the regiment. They relinquished their individualism and dedicated their lives to the ideals and honor of the regiment. In return for their submission, the regiment instilled in them the necessary courage in the most trying times.

Most logical people would agree that the outcome of the Civil War was pre-determined. Eventually, manpower and resources would tip the scales in favor of the North. But what if we did not have the luxury of hindsight? I am tempted to ponder how the war would have been different if the Fourteenth Regiment served only their three-month obligation. What if the Fourteenth were not on picket duty facing off against Jeb Stuart? What if the regiment was not successful at Culp's Hill? There would have been some subtle differences in the war. Perhaps it would have lasted longer. The simple realization that the war would have differed is remarkable. A small regiment, nearly always under strength, had an impact. Only a handful of units can claim they played a significant role in preserving the Union. The Fourteenth is one of the few.

America is a military powerhouse today. We can take on and defeat anyone who dares to challenge. But behind the technology lies the young soldier, sailor, airman or Marine. I cannot help but draw analogies to the Fourteenth Regiment. The same traits that empowered the Fourteenth exist today, if we are wise enough to heed them. We should embrace our diversity as did the Fourteenth two centuries ago. Our community today is the American community. As Brooklyn's social values and social forces mandated the men to fight, America's values and social forces expect us to fight and win. As a total force we rely on the reserve components of our respective services. The reserves today are the militia of yesteryear. They stand ready to fight. We draw some of the most capable and talented people in the country just as the Fourteenth drew the best from the borough. Training is as critical to our success as it was to the Fighting Fourteenth. Lastly, the idea that the spirit of a "Regiment" is a combat multiplier holds true today. The only difference is that we are sub servant to the entire service, not just a portion

of it. The sense of belonging to a special unit is readily apparent to those of us in the Marine Corps. The Corps is our master. When it comes time, the Corps, and those who have gone before provide the courage to press on. The same characteristics that made the Fourteenth one of history's finest units can be found everyday in our ranks. We just need to look for it.

Battlefields such as Spotsylvania and Wilderness are vanishing. Mini-marts, houses and bagel stores continue their encroachment on this sacred ground. Sadly, the Civil War, the dominant chapter in the novel that is our nation, continues its slide into obscurity for all but a handful of students. Depending on how you look at it, Ted Turner's movie about Gettysburg maybe the most influential Civil War study for the next fifty years. It becomes imperative then that those who study war to prepare for war have role models to emulate. The Fourteenth Brooklyn is worthy of further study by today's warriors.

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